

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

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FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1100

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGUI

AMEMBASSY COTONOU

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ABIDJAN 11150

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EAIR

SUBJ: AIR AFRIQUE

REF: STATE 285700

1. COMATT RECENTLY DISCUSSED SUBJECT OF REFTEL INFORMALLY WITH IVORY COAST CIVAIR DIRECTOR VASSIRIKI SAVANE. SAVANE FEELS THAT IVORY COAST IS THE MAINSTAY OF AIR AFRIQUE, NOTING THAT IVORY COAST IS THE GUARANTOR OF LOANS COVERING 3/4 OF THE AIR AFRIQUE FLEET, THAT ABIDJAN IS THE HEADQUARTERS AND CHIEF TRAFFIC POINT OF THE AIRLINE, AND THAT IVORY COAST IS "ONE OF FEW" MEMBER COUNTRIES WHICH PAY THEIR BILLS ON TIME. HE ALSO NOTED THAT THE PRESIDENT-DIRECTOR GENERAL (PDG) AND NUMEROUS OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS, INCLUDING THE SALES REPRESENTATIVES
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IN PARIS AND NEW YORK, ARE IVORIAN. IT WAS APPARENT

THE HE WAS PERSONALLY SCORNFUL OF THE GABONESE INTENTION TO QUIT AIR AFRIQUE (AS EXPRESSED RECENTLY IN JEUNE AFRIQUE AND ELSEWHERE). HE BELIEVES GABON CONTRIBUTES LITTLE TO AIR AFRIQUE.

2. THAT SAID, SAVANE COMMENTED THAT THE ISSUE OF SOVEREIGNTY WAS SO DELICATE, SO PRECIOUS TO SMALL AFRICAN MEMBER STATES, THAT A REALISTIC, COMMON APPROACH TO COMMON PROBLEMS WAS IMPOSSIBLE. IT WAS, HE SAID, UNTHINKABLE THAT ANY MEMBER STATE WOULD OPENLY COORDINATE ITS APPROACH TO CIVIL MATTERS WITH ANOTHER. AIR AFRIQUE DIRECTORS MEETINGS EVIDENCE THIS LACK OF MUTUAL CONFIDENCE AND THERE IS AN UNDERCURRENT OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS IVORY COAST AS THE LEADING AFRICAN MEMBER. IVORY COAST MUST, HE ADDED, LEAN OVER BACKWARDS TO AVOID THE ACCUSATION OF DOMINATING ITS "EQUALLY SOVEREIGN BUT FINANCIALLY WEAKER" CO-MEMBERS.

3. COMMENT: THESE ARE SAVANE'S PERSONAL VIEWS AND OBVIOUSLY NOT OFFICIAL GOIC POLICY. SAVANE PLAYS KEY ROLE IN GOIC CIVIL AVIATION MATTERS, HOWEVER, AND THIS TYPE OF THINKING SURELY INFLUENCES IVORIAN ATTITUDES. IT IS CLEAR THAT GOIC IS SENSITIVE TO CHARGES THAT ITS DOMINANT ROLE IN AIR AFRIQUE TENDS TO DISADVANTAGE OTHER MEMBERS. ALTHOUGH THE WEAKEST, MOST INDEBTED MEMBERS ARE THE MOST VOCIFEROUS IN DEMANDING "EQUALITY" IN TERMS OF THE PERQUISITES OF MEMBERSHIP: AIR SERVICE--OFTEN UNECONOMIC--TO THEIR CITIES AND JOBS FOR THEIR CITIZENS, THE GOIC TOLERATES, AND EVEN INDULGES THIS. SAVANE IMPLIED THAT AIR AFRIQUE MIGHT BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT SUCH MEMBERS, BUT QUICKLY ADDED THAT GOIC POLICY WAS TO PRESERVE AIR AFRIQUE AND TO PRESS FOR PROFITABLE RATIONAL AIRLINE MANAGEMENT. END COMMENT.

4. IN SEPARATE DISCUSSIONS WITH PAN AM'S BERMAN AND NAYLOR, THEY NOTED THAT THE U.S. CAB HAD AUTHORIZED DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN PAN AM AND AIR AFRIQUE, LEADING PERHAPS TO INCREASED "ASSOCIATION" IN THE AFRICAN SERVICE. PAN AM PROPOSED TO OFFER AIR AFRIQUE (1) GENERAL AGENCY SERVICE IN THE U.S. (TO REPLACE AIR

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FRANCE), (2) HANDLING FACILITIES AT JFK AIRPORT, (3) BLOCKED SPACE ABIDJAN-NAIROBI AND ON AN ADDITIONAL NEW YORK-ABIDJAN FREQUENCY (SUBJECT TO APPROVALS). JIM MICHAELSON, PAN AM VICE PRESIDENT FOR INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS, IS DUE TO ARRIVE IN ABIDJAN NEXT WEEK FOR MEETINGS WITH AOUSSOU KOFFI, AIR AFRIQUE PDG.

5. AT THIS POINT THE OFFICIAL IVORIAN POSITION REMAINS

THAT THE ONLY WAY FOR PAN AM TO SERVE ABIDJAN-DAKAR IS
IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A BLOCKED SPACE ("ASSOCIATION")
ARRANGEMENT WITH AIR AFRIQUE AS IS NOW THE CASE WITH
ONE OF THE TWO PAN AM WEEKLY FLIGHTS. CLEARLY THE GOIC
HOPES THAT AN INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THIS ARRANGEMENT
WILL OVERCOME THE "FIFTH FREEDOM" HURDLE ENCOUNTERED
IN BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS LAST OCTOBER.
STEARNS

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